

Nadler, Maloney Send Letter to Bush on Governors Island

Tuesday, 15 May 2001

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, after reading news reports that members of the Bush Administration have been quietly devising a legal strategy to overturn former President Clinton's designation of the Governors Island forts as national monuments, Representatives Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan) and Carolyn B. Maloney (D-Manhattan, Queens) sent the attached letter to President Bush. The letter asks President Bush to respect the bipartisan plan in place to preserve Governors Island and to select a member of his White House staff to serve as the chief point of contact on Governors Island for Governor George Pataki, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the New York City Council, the New York Senate and House delegation, and local civic, historic preservation, business, and environmental groups.

"I certainly hope that the President is not planning to overturn President Clinton's designation of two of New York's most historic sites as National Monuments," said Rep. Nadler. "This is not just a Jerrold Nadler issue because the island is in my district, nor is it a Democratic issue because Rep. Maloney and Sens. Schumer and Clinton are right there with me on this. This is a New York issue, and return of the Island to New York — with Castle Jay and Fort Williams designated as National Monuments — is something backed by the entire delegation, as well as our Republican Governor. For the President to make a move like this would be to tell all New Yorkers — Republican and Democrat — you just don't matter."

"Mr. President, remember the Alamo," Rep. Maloney said today after sending the letter to President Bush. "We know you would never consider selling a historic treasure like the Alamo from your state of Texas. The forts on Governors Island are national treasures as well. General George Washington and his troops would have been sacked without the cannon fortifications on Governors Island and the American Revolution may have failed. Washington's famous nighttime escape across the Hudson River when British Troops had them surrounded was possible because the cannon fortifications on Governors Island protected New York harbor from British Ships in New York Harbor. I hope that the President will join the bipartisan campaign to keep plans for Governors Island on track," Maloney added.

Today, it was reported in The New York Times and the New York Observer that the Bush Administration has been working on a legal strategy to reverse President Clinton's decision to declare forts on Governors Island national monuments. The media publications obtained a memo from the Bush Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel. In the memo, the Justice Department advises the General Services Administration, which oversees Governors Island, that there may be a legislative loophole requiring the Island to be sold at "fair market value" next year.

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Text of Letter attached.

May 16, 2001

President George W. Bush

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush,

We write to express great disappointment with the lack of responsiveness from your Administration regarding a matter of great importance to New York: the future of Governors Island.

We were alarmed to learn from news reports today that your Administration has been busy devising a legal strategy to overturn former President William J. Clinton's designation of the Governors Island forts as national monuments.

The plan, which will ultimately restore ownership of the Island to the state of New York, was reached through successful bipartisan collaboration over several years by Governor George Pataki, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the New York City Council, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Senator Charles Schumer, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, Representatives Jerrold Nadler and Carolyn B. Maloney, the entire House delegation and local civic, historic preservation, business, and environmental groups. We are unhappy to learn that your Administration is prepared to disturb this effort. Further, we are particularly concerned to learn about your Administration's efforts through the press, rather than through an official communication from a member of your Administration.

Several weeks ago, we contacted Interior Secretary Gale Norton to request clarification regarding her April 18 statements to the New York Post: "Before lowering the price tag of Governors Island with a monument designation, government leaders should examine the impact on the federal budget," Norton said. "It's an expensive piece of property," Norton said, "and the federal budget needs to be aware of the tradeoff between keeping the property and receiving money for that property." (The New York Post, April 18, 2001, NOT SO FAST ON GOVERNORS ISLAND SALE, FEDS SAY). Our offices were told by a representative from her legislative affairs office that the Secretary's schedule was "too busy" for this meeting request to be granted in a timely manner. Though they are seldom extravagant, membership does have its privileges, and one privilege of being a Member of Congress is that our requests to meet with Cabinet Secretaries are generally taken seriously.

Mr. President, we would like you to designate a member of your White House staff to serve as the lead point of contact for matters related to Governors Island. We would like to meet with this person as soon as possible to discuss both the Administration's position on the status of the monuments and the Administration's position on the disposition of the entire Island.

Mr. President, there are seldom issues that unite the entire state and city community of New York's elected officials. However, this is one of them. The fate of Governors Island deserves your Administration's attention. You have frequently said that you intend to represent "all of the people," even people living in areas of the country where you did not enjoy electoral success. We encourage you to view the bipartisan support behind Governors Island as an opportunity for you to show your commitment to responsible and responsive public service over politics. We look forward to an early and favorable reply.

Sincerely,

Jerrold Nadler

Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney

Member of Congress

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